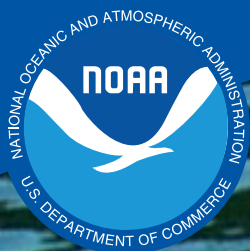


West Coast Groundfish Trawl Catch Share Program

September 2010



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

For more
information visit
the West Coast
Groundfish Trawl
Catch Share
Program link at
www.nwr.noaa.gov/

Questions?
Call toll free:
888-522-0267

Observer Program Frequently Asked Questions

What role does the observer program have in the trawl rationalization program?

The West Coast Groundfish Trawl Catch Share Program, also known as trawl rationalization, will begin in January 2011. Under the new program, 100% observer coverage is required of all vessels participating in the rationalized fishery. A proposed rule published in the Federal Register on August 31, 2010 (75 FR 53380) provides details of proposed observer coverage requirements discussed below.

What is an observer?

Fisheries observers are independent field biologists who collect catch and biological data at-sea. The Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) Observer Program Office certifies observer candidates who successfully complete NOAA Fisheries training. Fisheries observers must also meet conflict of interest standards.

What is included in the training of observers?

Fisheries observers are trained to identify species and are taught standardized sampling methodologies that are used to estimate catch and to take biological samples. Training also includes safety and communication skills.

Who is required to carry an observer under trawl rationalization?

Under the proposed rule, all vessels participating in the Trawl Rationalization Catch Share Program must carry a Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC)-certified observer during all trips until all fish from that trip have been offloaded. There are no exceptions to this requirement. The fisheries requiring coverage are:

- Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program – including trawl and non-trawl gear, whiting (Pacific hake) and nonwhiting
- Motherships receiving deliveries of Pacific hake
- Mothership catcher-vessels fishing for Pacific hake
- Catcher-processors fishing for Pacific hake

Who does the observer work for?

Observers are employed by private observer provider companies.

How much do observers cost?

The costs of observers are determined through a private contractual agreement between an individual vessel or group of vessels and an observer provider. Please contact your provider for information on costs.



How do I get an observer?

A vessel must contract with one of the five permitted observer provider companies:

- Alaskan Observer, Inc., Contact: David Edick, (206) 283-7310, aoistaff@alaskanobservers.com
- MRAG Americas, Inc., Contact: Bryan Belay, (907) 677-8772, bryan.belay@mragamericas.com
- NWO, Inc., Contact: Stacey Hanson, (425) 673-6445, alaska@nwoinc.com
- Saltwater, Inc., Contact: Tim Carroll/Kathy Robinson, (907) 276-3241, tim@saltwaterinc.com, kathy@saltwaterinc.com
- TechSea International, Inc., Contact: Troy Quinlan, (206) 285-1408, Info@Techsea.com

Do I have to feed and house the observer?

Yes, a vessel is required to provide observers with food and accommodations. On shorebased and mothership catcher vessels, observers must be provided with food and accommodations similar to that given to crew. On motherships and catcher processors, observers must be given food and accommodations similar to that given to officers. If space is limited, a crew member may have to stay on shore to accommodate the observer.

What role do the Northwest Fisheries Science Center observer programs have in the catch shares fishery?

The Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) is the division within NOAA Fisheries that manages observer programs for the groundfish fisheries. NWFSC observer programs are responsible for training and certifying observers; determining sampling methodologies; ensuring data quality; providing in-field support; and storage, maintenance, and analysis of the observer data. In addition, the NWFSC observer programs will provide all gear necessary for the observer, including scales, baskets, safety equipment, and sampling equipment.

What if I need to bring a tow aboard before the deck is cleared from the previous tow?

You will need to place all fish from the previous tow in a designated area separate from the catch for the new tow. This will ensure observers are able to randomly sample the catch from each tow.

What if I notice potential errors or discrepancies in the observer data?

Observers are trained in various methods to estimate the weight of catch depending on the situation. Aiding the observer, such as sorting species into IFQ groupings, will help improve the data collected. However, if there is still a question as to estimates, you also have the option of directing your crew to sort all species/groupings into observer baskets and to weigh each basket. The observer will monitor the sorting and weighing of species/ grouping in this case. Or you may retain species/grouping to get weights at the shorebased plant.

Can I use observer data to keep track of my total catch of IFQ species?

Yes. At the end of each trip, the observer will provide the vessel with a DRAFT trip level summary of IFQ catch. However, due to limited resources, the observer will primarily focus on the discarded portion of the catch, so retained IFQ catch data from the IFQ first receiver should be used. The NWFSC observer program will coordinate to ensure discard data is available on the vessel accounts system. Note: trip level summary receipts may not be available for the first few months of 2011.

Why can't I use cameras instead of observers?

After public and committee input and discussion, the Pacific Fishery Management Council voted against allowing the use of video technology to replace and/or supplement observer coverage.

What happens when an observer doesn't show up on time?

NWFSC recommends that vessels make arrangement with their observer provider for what to do if this occurs. However, if this is a frequent occurrence, please inform the NWFSC observer program.

What do I do if I suspect the observer is not fulfilling their job duties?

Please notify the observer provider as well as the NWFSC observer program supervisor immediately at (866) 780-8064.

If I have other questions about observers, who do I contact?

- For any questions regarding observer costs and arranging coverage, contact an observer provider company.
- For questions regarding observer program data collection, methodology, and operations, please contact Rebecca Hoch at: Rebecca.Hoch@noaa.gov, or (206) 302-1777.